

Need assessment for pre-travel consultation at a travel medicine clinic in northern Taiwan during and after the COVID-19 pandemic: a retrospective study

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Background: This study aimed to evaluate the different pre-travel consultation needs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Taiwan.

Materials and methods: We conducted a retrospective study and surveyed subjects who visited the travel clinic at a hospital in northern Taiwan. We recruited a total of 28,003 subjects between 2018 and 2023, and divided them into three groups based on time period (pre-pandemic (201801-202002), N= 12,640; pandemic (202003-202209), N= 9,995; post-pandemic (202210-202312), N=5,368). Anonymous subject data, including age, gender, travel destinations, purposes of travel and the vaccines or medications prescribed at the visits, were collected.

Results: Among all the groups (pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic), the younger subjects (aged 18-39 years) constituted the highest portion (65.6%, 68.5%, and 66.8%). In the pre-pandemic group, North America (36.2%) and Central and South America (12.5%) were the most common travel destinations; whereas in the pandemic and post-pandemic groups, North America (45.2% and 33.2%) and Southeast Asia (9.3% and 14.8%) were the most frequently visited regions. In terms of travel purposes, education (41.2%, 48.4%, and 42.1%) and business travel (17.6%, 28.2%, and 22.2%) were the top two reasons for traveling in the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic groups. Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel (9.9%) ranked third in the pandemic group, while self-guided tours (16% and 16.4%) were the third most common travel purpose in the pre- and post- pandemic group.

Conclusion: The pandemic has brought about changes in travel. It is crucial for physicians to provide pre-travel consultations that cater to the needs of international travelers during the pandemic.